

BIOGRAPHY

FOR

BEGINNERS



BIOGRAPHY FOR BEGINNERS

BEING A COLLECTION OF MISCELLANEOUS
EXAMPLES FOR THE USE OF UPPER FORMS

By

EDMUND CLERIHEW BENTLEY

AUTHOR OF "TRENT'S LAST CASE"

With 40 diagrams by G. K. CHESTERTON



*Mr. Werner Laurie
Is not at all sorry
He undertook the publication
Of this instructive compilation.*

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

I am unable to withstand
The world-wide demand
For another edition
Of this work of exposition.

I can no longer close my ears
To the entreaties and tears,
The passionate supplications,
Of the yearning nations.

To have enriched and refined
The universal mind
Affords me some measure
Of not ignoble pleasure.

But what most touches my heart
Is the contemplation of the part
Played by this that I have written
In the intellectual life of Britain.

To the biographic art
It has been able to impart
What is described by Dr. Limpet as
A new and salutary impetus.

On biographic style
(Formerly so vile)
The book has had an effect
Greater than I could reasonably expect.

The spirit and method
Have been immeasurably bettered,
And biography day by day
Has improved in every way.

I might instance Sir Sidney Lee's
Sympathetic handling of cheese,
Or Mr. G. M. Trevelyan's
Patient way with Italians;

While it would be an unpardonable laches
To deny to Mr. Lytton Strachey's
Masterly treatment of Vespasian
A word of hearty commendation.

.
If I may glance briefly at a
Purely personal matter,
I would refer to a change on that vital page
Technically known as the title-page.

When first it dawned upon mankind,
Biography for Beginners was signed
(For reasons with which I will not weary you)
With the name of E. Clerihew.

I am not without a claim
To the use of that honourable name,
Which those who happened to be listening
Heard bestowed on me at my christening.

But (for reasons which would only bore you)
The name on the edition before you
Has been changed—I hope not detrimentally
—To Edmund Clerihew Bentley.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Art of Biography
Is different from Geography.
Geography is about Maps,
But Biography is about Chaps.



SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN

Sir Christopher Wren

Said, "I am going to dine with some men.

"If anybody calls

"Say I am designing St. Paul's."



MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

The people of Spain think Cervantes
Equal to half-a-dozen Dantes:
An opinion resented most bitterly
By the people of Italy.



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Mr. Bernard Shaw

Was just setting out for the war,
When he heard it was a dangerous trade
And demonstrably underpaid.



SIR HUMPHREY DAVY

Sir Humphrey Davy

Abominated gravy.

He lived in the odium

Of having discovered Sodium.



J. S. MILL

John Stuart Mill,
By a mighty effort of will,
Overcame his natural bonhomie
And wrote "Principles of Political Economy."



FRANÇOIS LISZT

The Abbé Liszt

Hit the piano with his fist.

That was the way

He used to play.



LORD CLIVE

What I like about Clive
Is that he is no longer alive.
There is a great deal to be said
For being dead.



KING EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

Edward the Confessor

Slept under the dresser.

When that began to pall,

He slept in the hall.



THE REV. JOHN CLIFFORD

M.A., LL.B., D.D.

Dr. Clifford

And I have differed.

He disapproves of gin:

I disapprove of sin.



MESSRS. CHAPMAN & HALL

Chapman & Hall

Swore not at all.

Mr. Chapman's yea was yea,

And Mr. Hall's nay was nay.



KARL MARX

Karl Marx

Was completely wrapped up in his sharks.

The poor creatures seriously missed him

While he was attacking the capitalist system.



OTTO THE GREAT

The great Emperor Otto
Could not decide upon a motto.
His mind wavered between
“L’Etat C’est Moi” and “Ich Dien.”



MARCONI

Guglielmo Marconi

Was brought up on macaroni,

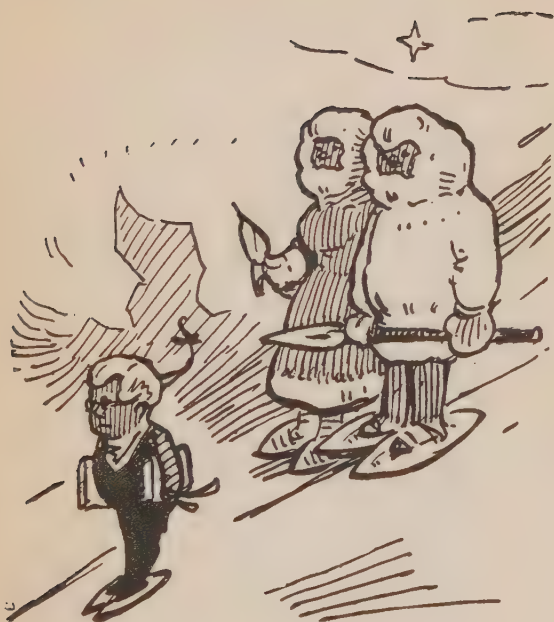
But when he gets it now

There's no end of a row.



DAVID HUME

That you have all heard of Hume
I tacitly assume;
But you didn't know, perhaps,
That his parents were Lapps.



MR. H. BELLOC

Mr. Hilaire Belloc .

Is a case for legislation ad hoc.

He seems to think nobody minds

His books being all of different kinds.



JOB

It is understood that Job
Never read "The Globe";
But nothing could be higher than
His opinion of Leviathan.



PIZARRO

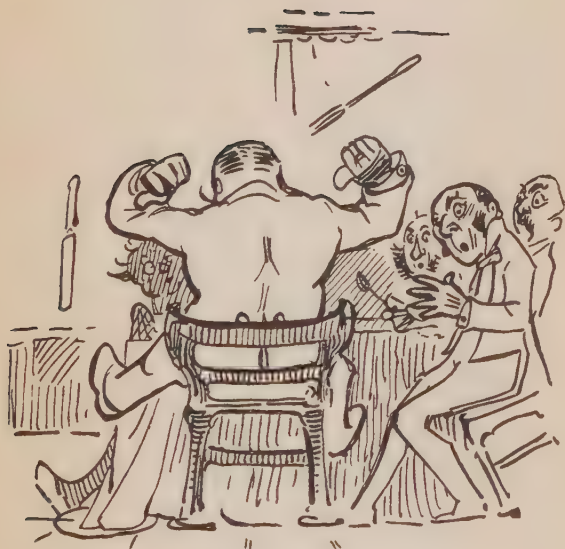
The views of Pizarro
Were perhaps a little narrow.
He killed the Caciques
Because (he said) they were sneaks.



THE DUKE OF FIFE

K.T., P.C., G.C.V.O.

It looked bad when the Duke of Fife
Left off using a knife;
But people began to talk
When he left off using a fork.



THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

The great Duke of Wellington
Reduced himself to a skellington.
He reached seven stone two,
And then—Waterloo!



JOHN BUNYAN

I do not extenuate Bunyan's
Intemperate use of onions,
But if I knew a wicked ogress
I would lend her "The Pilgrim's Progress."



GEORGE HIRST

When I faced the bowling of Hirst
I ejaculated, "Do your worst!"
He said, "Right you are, Sid."
—And he did.



ERASMUS AND THE HUMANISTS

After dinner, Erasmus

Told Colet not to be "blas'mous"

Which Colet, with some heat,

Requested him to repeat.



TIZIANO VECELLI

When the great Titian
Was in a critical condition,
He was carefully nursed
By Francis the First.



PROFESSOR JAMES DEWAR, F.R.S.

Professor Dewar

Is a better man than you are,

None of you asses

Can condense gases.



SIR WALTER RALEIGH

Sir Walter Raleigh

Bickered down the valley.

But he could do better than the rill,

For he could bicker up-hill.



JANE AUSTEN

The novels of Jane Austen
Are the ones to get lost in.

.

I wonder if Labby
Has read "Northanger Abbey" ?



ODO OF BAYEUX

Archbishop Odo

Was just in the middle of "Dodo,"

When he remembered that it was Sunday.

"Sic transit gloria mundi."



DAVID RICARDO

The intrepid Ricardo
With characteristic bravado,
Alluded openly to Rent
Wherever he went.



SIR THOMAS A MALLORY

Sir Thomas à Mallory

Always went to the gallery.

He said, not without nous,

That it was the best place in the house.



MR. ALFRED BEIT

Mr. Alfred Beit

Screamed suddenly in the night.

When they asked him why

He made no reply.



CIMABUE

When they told Cimabue

He didn't know how to cooec,

He replied, " Perhaps I mayn't,

But I do know how to paint."



PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

If only Mr. Roosevelt
Knew how officers in the Blues felt,
He wouldn't be so rife
With his Strenuous Life.



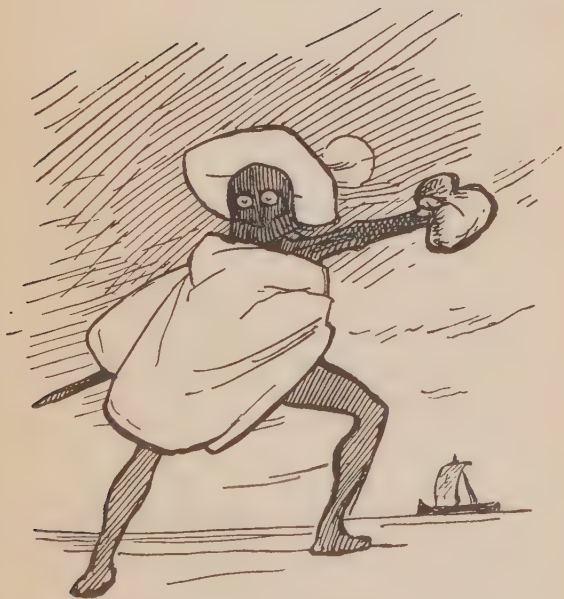
ROBERT HARLEY, EARL OF OXFORD

People wondered why Harley
Sang "Wae's me for Prince Charlie."
"It is childish," they said, "to mourn
For a person not yet born."



SIR ALEXANDER FULLER
ACLAND-HOOD, M.P.

Sir Alexander Acland-Hood
Believed in Free Food;
But he was Eleusinian
About this opinion.



MAHOMET

I am not Mahomet.

—Far from it.

That is the mistake

All of you seem to make.



EDVARD GRIEG

The musician Grieg

Joined the Primrose League.

It gave him the idea of his chorus,

"The Unburied Ichthyosaurus."



JAN VAN EYCK

The younger Van Eyck
Was christened Jan, and not Mike.
The thought of this curious mistake
Often kept him awake.



MR. T. WERNER LAURIE

Mr. Werner Laurie

Is not at all sorry

He undertook the publication

Of this instructive compilation.



INDEX OF PSYCHOLOGY

(In all work of a biographic character it is important to make copious reference to as many as possible of the generally-recognized virtues, vices, good points, foibles, peculiarities, tricks, characteristics, little weaknesses, traits, imperfections, fads, idiosyncrasies, singularities, morbid symptoms, oddities, faults, and regrettable propensities set forth in the following table. The form of an alphabetic index, with references to the examples given in the preceding pages, has been chosen, so that the beginner who may be desirous, when trying his hand at work of this sort, of seeing how any given one of these subjects may best be treated, is enabled at once to turn to one or more model passages.)

Agitation, reluctance to explain (BEIT).

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